

Duxbury Clipper

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Arts Center Gets Report Card

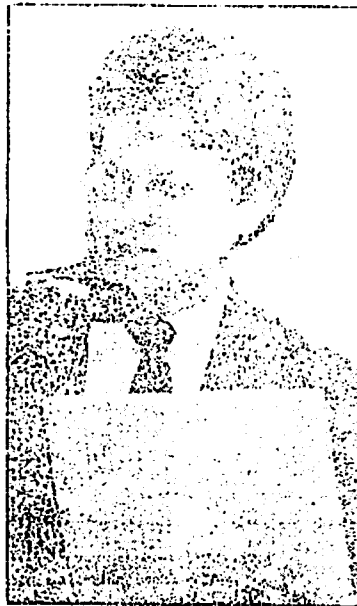
By KEITH L. MARTIN

All one-year-olds begin to develop a personality while still facing growing pains and it seems the town's Performing Arts Center is no different.

At last Wednesday's school committee meeting, PAC Manager Tony Kelso gave the group an overview of the \$8.2 million building, from how it has been used since opening last June to where it could be headed in the future.

"This is a wonderful facility," he said. "We should all be proud we have this in our schools and in our community."

Kelso said that the PAC has played host to 46 school events, four community events and four outside performances, with some being held over multiple nights.



Performing Arts Center Manager Tony Kelso discussed the past year of events at the building, as well as challenges generated over that same time period.

Kelso said that the focus is to remain a multi-use facility, an important part of any mission statement for the building.

"In terms of priority, the schools are first," he said. "Second is the community. The town of Duxbury paid for this...and should use it."

As for the third group of outside performers, Kelso said that this is the best avenue to generate revenue, but warned that performing arts centers are "not the cash cows of financial gain that they might appear."

With the building at its most available during the summer when school is out, Kelso said that the best groups to target are those "summer-friendly," but that by marketing the building through its consistent use, improved website and even the low-tech aspect of improving signage in town to direct people to the PAC, word of the benefits of the structure will spread.

In terms of gaining revenue from outside groups, School Business Manager Mickey McGonagle said that the amount of use the PAC endures is almost a double-edged sword. If it remains limited to schools, it generates no income, but means fewer expenses. If it is opened up to a lot of outside performances, which generate revenue for the management of the building, it means more wear and tear on the structure and its equipment.

School committee member Karen Wong said bringing in outside groups to the PAC "adds richness to the community" and looking at the future, saw fundraising as an option that Kelso's proposed task force could explore.

Member John Magnarelli said that he "doesn't see the PAC balancing our budget," and should be used as much as possible. He suggested looking into different avenues to generate operating revenue.

The committee instructed Superintendent Eileen Williams to look into creating a PAC task force to work with Kelso and help guide the building into the future.

While this is a positive, the building still faces challenges, he said, such as being too big for some production companies to fill yet too small for others, a lack of a dedicated box office, meaning outside groups must sell their own tickets, and a complex schedule that must revolve around the school year, creating few open slots.

The growth stage of the PAC over the next couple years, said Kelso, will help determine what works in the building and what doesn't as well as "breaking in" the facility and its sophisticated operating systems. He also said that as word spreads about the building, relationships will grow to balance all three uses the PAC is currently seeing with the goal of making it a "true arts center with a wide variety of programs."

After his evaluation, Kelso made some recommendations to address the maturity of the building. Among the things he'd like to see are developing staff at the building, including a manager to focus on scheduling, marketing and business, while also incorporating a house manager dedicated to the safety and well being of the audiences and user groups. He also recommended hiring a technical director to oversee the sophisticated equipment,

including sound and lighting systems.

The past year has also shown some need for physical changes at the PAC, said Kelso, most noticeably the creation of a box office for both professional and school events. Kelso said the current box office space in the cafeteria could be changed to a food service area and an office closer to the lower entrance would work more effectively.

He also suggested creating an alternate exit for upper tier seating to prevent the current gridlock at the front of the lobby as people come down the large staircase. Kelso said a new entrance could be achieved by using the existing stairwell in the back lobby and breaking through a wall, creating an exit that meets fire codes.

With increased staff and a better use of space, Kelso said another need is to address the programming under the PAC's roof.

He recommended the school department create a small task force of knowledgeable arts professionals in the area to develop a mission statement and a long-range plan, as well as potentially create a standing committee to address fundraising and other issues.

Looking at how the building has been used in year one,